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C O N F I D E N T I A L THE HAGUE 002997

SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: SCC WESTON MEETS WITH DUTCH MFA

REF: THE HAGUE 2636

Classified By: Ambassador Sobel for reasons 1.5 (b and d)

1. (C) Summary: SCC Amb. Tom Weston, accompanied by Amb. Sobel, met with MFA Political Director Hugo Siblesz on November 24, followed by a meeting with MFA deputy Political Director for European Affairs Schaper, deputy DG for European Affairs Ed Kronenberg, and DCM Russel. Weston briefed MFA counterparts on his visit to Turkey, Greece, and Cyprus and outlined the possibilities for a Cyprus settlement in coming months. He strongly encouraged the Dutch and the EU to make forward leaning statements before and immediately following the December 12-13 EU Council meeting, which precedes elections in northern Cyprus by one day. Encouragement that prospects for accession negotiations were good if Turkey further implements necessary reforms and advances the settlement of the Cyprus issue would positively influence Turkey's planned new year initiative on Cyprus. Siblesz stressed that domestic politics will prevent the GoNL from actively campaigning for Turkish accession, and the Dutch Presidency of the EU in the second half of 2004 is a blessing in disguise: rather than opposing a decision to start negotiations, the GoNL can "hide" behind the impartiality of its Presidency. End Summary.

2. (C) SCC Amb. Weston met with MFA policy makers in the Hague on November 24, and outlined his recent meetings in Turkey, Greece and Cyprus. Weston stressed the importance of positive statements in upcoming weeks and months by the EU on Turkish prospects for opening EU accession negotiations as an incentive for both the political leadership in Turkey and the populations in Cyprus to achieve a workable solution to the Cyprus question. In view of the Turkish intention to launch an initiative of some sort in January, the right message from Europe will help ensure the Turks accept the need to get the parties back into negotiations before May on the basis on Annan 3. MFA DirGen for Political Affairs Hugo Siblesz thanked Weston for the briefing, and agreed on the importance of the next few months. However, Siblesz stressed Prime Minister Balkenende's disappointment with his recent visit to Ankara, calling the meeting with Prime Minister Erdogan "a stonewalling." According to Siblesz, Erdogan said of Cyprus, "It's your problem, not ours. You allowed Cyprus to enter without meeting the political criteria." Siblesz believes Turkey missed a "real chance" to communicate the right message to Balkenende, particularly in light of the future Dutch EU presidency.

3. (C) Balkenende's message to Ankara was that if no settlement has been achieved by December 2004, Turkey's accession will be "very complicated" (ref A). Weston stressed the importance of European member-state leaders making encouraging statements before the EU Council meeting December 12-13. Such statements could positively affect the December 14 election outcome in northern Cyprus, allowing the opposition to gain votes and momentum. (Note: Weston stated positive statements by the EU Council are also important, but the Council meeting, ending the day prior to elections, is not likely to make a strong impact. End Note.) Because of strong domestic pressure against Turkish membership, Siblesz said Balkenende will not commit himself to moving beyond the Commission's report. Siblesz also made it clear the Prime Minister would be "hard pressed" to go beyond his statements in Ankara, but that the Dutch EU presidency might be a blessing in disguise. Rather than letting negative political sentiment coalesce into opposition to opening accession talks with Turkey, the GoNL will be able to play the impartiality card of the Dutch EU presidency.

4. (C) In a separate meeting, MFA Deputy DirGen for European Affairs Ed Kronenburg and MFA Deputy DirGen for Political Affairs were slightly more positive. Kronenburg fully understood Weston's desire for strong, early statements by the EU in favor of Turkish membership, comprehending that waiting too long will remove any momentum for a solution in Cyprus. Kronenburg and Schaper will discuss such options with other EU members. However, Schaper again noted the strong domestic pressure on the government against Turkish membership will prohibit Dutch leadership on this issue in public fora.

5. Amb. Weston cleared this cable.
SOBEL